POLITICS-US: Welcome to "Islamo-Fascism Awareness Week"
By Khody Akhavi and Ali Gharib

WASHINGTON, Oct 26 (IPS) - Right-wing pundit David Horowitz was in rare form during a tightly controlled "public speech" at the George Washington University on Thursday night, decrying the U.S. academic Left as a hateful "lynch mob" who act as apologists for the impending threat of the "Islamo-fascist" Jihad.

As bodyguards and police loomed on stage and in the aisles, Horowitz launched into an unscripted two-hour tirade that meandered between selective (and dubious) readings of Middle East history and pointed attacks against those who criticised his efforts.

It was the latest permutation of Horowitz's long march as the harbinger of revolutionary knowledge in the face of public opprobrium. And as usual, he offered up a sensational and bizarre spectacle that appeared better suited for the U.S. tabloid talk show circuit than a forum of legitimate public debate.

During his speech, sponsored by the conservative student group Young America Foundation, Horowitz condemned the "oppression of women in Islam", and what he perceived as the endemic "genocidal Jew hatred" throughout the Middle East. He took aim at the "juvenile delinquents" -- GW university students -- who had satirised his efforts, said that Palestinians, through their actions, showed that they did not want a state of their own. Horowitz also alleged that the Muslim Students Association, which has chapters at universities across the nation, is a creation of the "Islamo-fascist jihad".

He called Lebanese Hezbollah a "Naz party," and warned that Turkey was teetering on the edge of becoming an Islamo-fascist state. And he described Iran as the archetype of this phenomenon.

"There is an intellectual terror in this country, which you have all seen. The president [George W. Bush] is intimidated from using the term Islamo-fascism because it is supposed to be racist," he told an audience of students, a majority of whom applauded his words.

"Why the term fascism? The analytical reason is simple," he said. "Probably Islamo-Nazism is a more appropriate term.

Horowitz's conservative Freedom Centre (DHFC) designated last week as the first annual "Islamo-fascism Awareness Week" -- a time to refute "the two big lies of the political Left: that George Bush created the war on terror and that global warming is a greater danger to Americans than the terrorist threat."

The programme consisted of more than 30 events at 26 universities across the nation. Conservative pundits, politicians, and academic and think-tank experts, including former Senator Rick Santorum, conservative icon Ann Coulter, and historian Daniel Pipes, delivered speeches and spoke on panels.

Pipes is among a small group of neoconservatives who advise Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani on Middle East affairs.

College students were urged to stage sit-ins outside women's studies departments, and to distribute pamphlets, including titles such as "Jimmy Carter's War Against the Jews." Films screened included "Islam: What the West Needs to Know". According to its description, the film "reveals the violent, expansionary ideology of the so called 'religion of peace' that seeks the destruction or subjugation of other faiths, cultures, and systems of government."

But Horowitz's speech Thursday did not reflect a coherent policy towards the perceived threat. Instead, it overflowed with insults, sweeping generalisations and hyperbole that were aimed at smearing his political enemies -- mostly liberals, whom he described as "leftists" -- giving him ammunition for his fundraising drives.

Horowitz focused much of his speech on the personal attacks he had received, repeatedly alluding to violent threats, and describing the fiasco as a "national hate campaign" against him, as if a "target had been placed on" his back.

The day earlier, he said, he was shouted down and was unable to finish a planned speech at Emory University in Georgia. Horowitz's website, Frontpagemag.com, called the students "brownshirts", an allusion to a Nazi paramilitary group in fascist Germany.

Horowitz sent a solicitation email to DHFC supporters in anticipation of the week asking for additional contributions "toward the expenses of providing security" for speakers. Donors of 50 dollars or more receive two booklets -- "What Americans Need to Know About Jihad", by Robert Spencer, and "The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam", by Robert Spencer and Phyllis Chesler.

On Thursday, he appeared on stage with a large bodyguard constantly scanning the crowd. Journalists were
barred from asking any questions.

One protestor who had snuck a banner into the theatre was removed quickly by security as soon as he stood up and unfurled it. Several heated discussions occurred in the lobby and outside the building shortly after the event ended.

The publicity provided by the extreme rhetoric and protest incidents gets the attention of a cabal of wealthy and powerful conservatives who in turn fund Horowitz’s activities through foundations.

The Freedom Centre has received more than 15 million dollars in grants from conservative donors, according a report from Media Transparency, an organisation that monitors contributions to conservative media. Major contributors include the John M. Olin Foundation, a New York based think-tank that closed its doors in 2005, and which funded major right-wing think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Institute.

Prominent conservative billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife has poured 4.2 million dollars into Horowitz’s activities, through the Sarah Scaife Foundation, the Carthage Foundation, and the Allegheny Foundation.

Horowitz also received 6.1 million dollars from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, considered the country’s largest and most influential right-wing foundation.

By the end of the week, "Islamo-fascism Awareness" had descended into a publicity circus.

According to independent journalist Max Blumenthal, who was in attendance at the IFAW Horowitz talk on Friday at Columbia University, Horowitz was surrounded by a group of bodyguards that almost outnumbered the amount of people there to protest his speech. Columbia security subsequently removed the protesters from the campus.

Horowitz went on a bizarre rant -- claiming that there "will never be social justice" -- and launched into a tirade about the threats from the guests on the Jerry Springer Show, a U.S. television tabloid talk show. He also compared his own father, a communist Queens schoolteacher, to Mohammad Atta, the operational leader of the 9/11 attacks.

"It was like listening to the ravings of a lunatic on a subway car," said Blumenthal. "The only difference was that on the subway the police are there to remove the lunatic and here they were there to protect the lunatic."

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